

Appl. No. : 009,851
Filed : November 6, 2001

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please cancel Claims 22-33 and 44-47.

Please add Claim 48.

1-33. (Cancelled).

34. (Previously Presented) A thermal treatment installation/ring combination comprising a loading chamber, loading means, transport means and a thermal treatment chamber for carrying out a thermal treatment, said thermal treatment chamber comprising a top section and a bottom section located opposite to each other and between which a wafer can be accommodated for carrying out a thermal treatment, said transport means being equipped to move wafer/ring combinations from the loading chamber into the thermal treatment chamber and vice versa, wherein said thermal treatment chamber is configured to carry out a thermal treatment on one wafer at a time, said transport means being equipped to move individual wafer/ring combinations from the loading chamber and insert said individual wafer/ring combination into the thermal treatment chamber and vice versa, wherein the thermal treatment chamber is configured to accommodate said ring surrounding the wafer.

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35. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment/ring combination of Claim 34, wherein said top section and bottom section are provided with heating means.

36. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 34, wherein an internal diameter of an inner edge of the ring is larger than an external diameter of the wafer.

37. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 34, wherein the ring is configured to support said wafer at least during transfer.

38. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 37, wherein the ring is mechanically joined to the transport means.

39. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 37, wherein the treatment chamber is configured to accommodate an auxiliary element for supporting the ring and the wafer at least during transfer.

40. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 39, wherein said auxiliary element is mechanically joined to the transport means.

41. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 39, wherein said ring is provided with heating means.

Appl. No. : 009,851
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42. (Previously Presented) A thermal treatment installation/ring combination, wherein a thermal treatment installation comprises a treatment chamber delimited by two opposite sections, at least one of said sections being provided with a gas supply for positioning a wafer floating between said sections, said ring configured to be placed between said sections, wherein in an operating position a distance between said two sections at a location of said ring substantially corresponds to a thickness of said ring, and wherein at least three radial gas passages are arranged between said ring and at least one section.

43. (Previously Presented) The thermal treatment installation/ring combination of Claim 42, wherein said passages are provided in said sections.

44-47. (Cancelled).

48. (New) A thermal treatment installation/ring combination comprising a loading chamber, wherein one wafer of a set of wafers and a ring are combined to form a wafer/ring combination, a handling robot and a thermal treatment chamber for carrying out a thermal treatment, said thermal treatment chamber comprising a top section and a bottom section located opposite to each other and between which the one wafer can be accommodated for carrying out a thermal treatment, said handling robot being equipped to move wafer/ring combinations from the loading chamber into the thermal treatment chamber and vice versa, wherein said thermal treatment chamber is configured to carry out a thermal treatment on one wafer at a time, said handling robot being equipped to move individual wafer/ring combinations from the loading chamber and insert said individual wafer/ring combination into the thermal treatment chamber and vice versa, wherein the thermal treatment chamber is configured to accommodate said ring surrounding the wafer.